

"GOD 'MEMBERS US"



IN that well-known classic of travel, *My Winter on the Nile*, Charles Dudley Warner speaks of the deep-rooted conviction of the devout Moslem that illnesses, accidents, losses and troubles of every kind are so many tokens and evidences of God's care and kindly remembrance. After the dragoman, Abd-el-Atti, pronounced a tempest as "the worser storm ever I saw in Egypt," he added the naïve comment, "It show that God 'member us."

"A friend of me in Cairo was never in his life ill," Abd-el-Atti continues, "never any pain, toothache, headache, nothing. Always well. He begin to have fear that something should happen, mebbe God forgot him. One day I meet him in the Moos-keë, very much pleased; all right now; he been broke him the arm; God 'member him."

There is a touch of grotesqueness in the matter-of-fact emphasis that the dragoman puts upon his theory of affliction, and probably the old Hebrew belief that earthly prosperity is an indication of God's favor makes a stronger appeal to the average mind. It seems more natural that a God of infinite goodness and love should reveal Himself to his creatures by bestowing good gifts than by withholding them, or by sending painful experiences into their lives—and yet the Old Testament thinkers discovered again and again that their comfortable theory went wide of the hard facts of life. Job strikes a saving compromise in the pertinent question, "Shall we receive good at the hand of God, and shall we not receive evil?"

The ground truth seems to be that good and evil, as applied to the outward circumstance of any life, are relative terms. Abject poverty, for example, is generally counted an unmixed misfortune. It robs us of common comforts, to which we seem justly entitled; it narrows life to a wearing treadmill of drudgery and often paves the way to moral degeneration. But in exceptional cases poverty proves a stepping-stone to success, and even to greatness, and those who have mounted to an eminence by it admit frankly that they could hardly have reached the heights without its aid. In such cases there is little difficulty in seeing that God's severe discipline, although painful in itself, looked to a higher good than the individual would have been likely to seek after for himself. There always remains the unanswered question, "Was not God's remembrance of scores of others just as kindly and beneficent, had the good intent of the bitter experience been recognized and improved?"

What we call the misfortunes of life do not slip in, unobserved, while God's face is turned away. They are integral parts of the particular discipline that God sees is best adapted to our peculiar type of soul. If we have what seems more than our share of hard experience, it may well be that we have more than the average of undiscovered possibilities, and need a stronger pressure to bring them to light. If God is indeed our Loving Father, He keeps us in his thought and expects us to find warning or guidance or incentive or uplift in every element of our experience, be it bright or be it dark.



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